



Martin Gross, MD, FAAP
Aaron Bornstein, MD, FAAP
Amy Hatch, RN, CPNP

Hilary Welland, MD, FAAP
Carolina Gapud, MD, FAAP
Meredith Rubini, RN, CPNP

Marijuana- Facts and Risks

As of 2012, rates of use of Marijuana by teenagers in the U.S. reached a 30 year peak. This is an alarming statistic when considering the dangers of the use of marijuana, particularly among youth. We have seen firsthand in our patients the damaging effects marijuana has had in both the immediate term and on the futures of our patients. The brief information below is designed to help clear up misconceptions/myths about marijuana, but you are encouraged to read more thoroughly about marijuana and substance abuse at the websites below.

MYTH #1: MARIJUANA IS SAFE

FALSE! There are many negative effects of marijuana

Marijuana can cause serious problems with learning, feelings, and health. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the active ingredient in marijuana. THC affects the brain's control of emotions, thinking, and coordination.

Short term use of marijuana can lead to:

- Poor school performance, worsening grades
- Breathing and lung problems
- Problems with memory and concentration
- Increased aggression
- Car accidents
- Use of other drugs or alcohol
- Risky sexual behaviors
- Increased risk of suicide
- Increased risk of psychosis

Long-term use of marijuana can lead to:

- The same breathing problems as smoking cigarettes (coughing, wheezing, trouble with physical activity, and lung cancer)
- Addiction (including giving up other important activities, withdrawal symptoms)
- Decreased motivation or interest
- Lower intelligence
- Mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, anger, moodiness, and psychosis
- Decreased or lack of response to mental health medication
- Increased risk of side effects from mental health medication

MYTH #2: MY PARENTS USED IT, SO IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL

Marijuana use became popularized in the 1960's, but since then, **there have been major changes** which have increased the negative impact of its use on youth.

- The average age of users has dropped from over 19 to just under 17, and the age at which kids first start trying marijuana has dramatically decreased. The risks of addiction and long term problems of use increase the younger you are.
- The availability of higher potency marijuana, measured by levels of the chemical delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), is increasing. Average THC levels rose from less than 1 percent in the mid-1970s to more than 6 percent in 2002. Sinsemilla potency increased in the past two decades from 6 percent to more than 13 percent, with some samples containing THC levels of up to 33 percent. **In brief, a joint today is likely to be 6-10 times more powerful than “your parent’s” joint 30-40 years ago.**

MYTH #3: IF IT IS “MEDICAL” IT IS OK TO USE

FALSE! Currently, only man-made forms of THC are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for a very small number of specific medical uses. **There are no FDA-approved medical reasons for children or teenagers to use marijuana or THC in any form. The FDA has determined that the scientific research to date does not support the “medical use” of smoking marijuana as the clearly identified risks outweigh any marginal benefits, and notes that smoking as a means of drug delivery is almost never advisable due to the health risk.**

"Medical marijuana" is not checked for ingredients, strength, or safety. There is no evidence that medical marijuana is any safer than other marijuana.

The use of marijuana is illegal in the United States and prohibited by Federal law. However, medical marijuana laws are different from state to state. Several states allow the use of medical marijuana for adults. Almost all of these states still say that it is a crime for minors to sell, have, or use marijuana.

MYTH #4: MARIJUANA IS NOT ADDICTIVE

FALSE! Regular use of marijuana can lead to dependence and addiction, which causes users to have a very hard time stopping. When teens use marijuana regularly, they may crave marijuana and give up important activities to use marijuana. If they stop using, they may suffer from withdrawal symptoms which can include irritability, anxiety, and changes in mood, sleep, and appetite. **Currently more adolescents are in treatment for marijuana disorders than all other substances (including alcohol) combined.**

MYTH #5: MARIJUANA MAKES YOU MELLOW

FALSE! Marijuana use is associated with higher risk of mental health problems. High doses of marijuana can produce a temporary psychotic reaction (involving hallucinations and paranoia) in some users, and using marijuana can worsen the course of illness in patients with schizophrenia. A series of large prospective studies also showed a link between marijuana use and later development of psychosis. This relationship was influenced by genetic variables as well as the amount of drug used and the age at which it was first taken—those who start young are at increased risk for later problems.

Associations have also been found between marijuana use and other mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts among adolescents, and personality disturbances, including a lack of motivation to engage in typically rewarding activities.

Other web-based resources for information on marijuana and substance abuse:

1. <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts>
 - a. Excellent resource from National Institute of Drug Abuse written for teenagers. Comprehensive.
2. <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts>
 - a. Comprehensive overview from National Institute of Drug abuse written for adults.
3. https://www.ncjrs.gov/ondcppubs/publications/pdf/marijuana_myths_facts.pdf
 - a. Myths and facts about marijuana use
4. <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/marijuana-facts-teens/some-things-to-think-about>
 - a. From the National Institutes of Health
5. <http://www.healthychildren.org>
 - a. This website is by the American Academy of pediatrics for a very broad range of topics for patients and parents. Use search for “marijuana” or “substance abuse”

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